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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 004632

SIPDIS

STATE PASS AIT/W, INR/EAP

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: PRE-ELECTION SCENE SETTER: TAINAN COUNTY

REF: TAIPEI 4158

Classified By: AIT DIRECTOR DOUGLAS PAAL, REASON(S): 1.4 (B/D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. PRESIDENT CHEN SHUI-BIAN'S HOME COUNTY IS VIEWED BY BOTH THE KMT AND THE DPP IN THE SOUTH AS AN "INDEX" ELECTION. IF DPP CANDIDATES CANNOT WIN EASILY WHERE THE DEEPEST GREENS FLOURISH, SOME BELIEVE THE ADMINISTRATION HAS NO HOPE OF WINNING THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. RECENT PUBLIC OPINION POLLS, GROWING DPP CONCERNS ABOUT ITS OWN CANDIDATE FOR MAGISTRATE, AND CONTINUING DPP SCANDALS INDICATE TAINAN COUNTY IS NOT THE SLAM-DUNK DPP LEADERS INITIALLY BELIEVED. LOW VOTER TURNOUT AMONG BOTH DISAFFECTED DPP SUPPORTERS AND THE LARGE BODY OF UNDECIDED VOTERS FURTHER ENDANGERS DPP PROSPECTS. THE BEST HOPE FOR THE KMT IN THIS DEEP GREEN HAVEN IS SIMPLY TO LIE LOW -- A STRATEGY WELL-FITTED TO ITS OWN LACKLUSTER CANDIDATE -- AND LET THE DPP'S SCANDALS AND OTHER PROBLEMS WORK TO ITS ADVANTAGE. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) IN A MEETING ON NOVEMBER 2, DPP COUNTY CHAIRMAN KUO KUO-WEN READILY ACKNOWLEDGED TO AIT/K THAT THE DPP HAS BEEN HURT BY THE ONGOING REVELATIONS OF CORRUPTION EMERGING FROM THE KAOHSIUNG RAPID TRANSIT CORPORATION (KRTC) SCANDAL. ALTHOUGH INTERNAL DPP POLLS IN LATE OCTOBER PREDICTED A COMFORTABLE WIN FOR DPP CANDIDATE, INCUMBENT MAGISTRATE SU HUAN-CHIH, AN EARLY NOVEMBER POLL REVEALED A SERIOUS DECLINE IN SUPPORT. DPP COUNTY CHAIRMAN KUO TOLD AIT/K THAT THE DISAFFECTION IS MOSTLY AMONG THE LARGE BODY OF CENTRIST VOTERS, WHO, HE BELIEVES, WILL NOT SHIFT THEIR SUPPORT TO THE KMT, BUT RATHER WILL SIMPLY NOT VOTE. A LOW VOTER TURNOUT, KUO CONTINUED, DEFINING HIGH TURNOUT AS 70 PERCENT AND LOW TURNOUT AS 40 PERCENT, COULD HAND THE ELECTION TO THE KMT.

13. (C) CHAIRMAN KUO TOLD AIT/K THAT, WHILE PRESIDENT CHEN'S PRESENCE MAY BE LESS WELCOME ELSEWHERE, IT WILL BE HELPFUL TO DPP CANDIDATES IN TAINAN COUNTY SIMPLY BECAUSE THIS IS CHEN'S HOME TURF. PEOPLE IN TAINAN COUNTY DO NOT BELIEVE THE PRESIDENT WAS INVOLVED DIRECTLY IN THE KRTC SCANDAL, KUO CONTINUED, BUT RATHER BLAME FORMER PRESIDENTIAL POLICY ADVISOR CHEN CHE-NAN FOR DECEIVING THE PRESIDENT AND BRINGING DISGRACE ON THE PARTY. PRESIDENT CHEN, KUO EXPLAINED, IS THE ONLY DPP LEADER WHO CAN AROUSE VOTERS AND BOOST SUPPORT FOR MAGISTRATE SU'S RE-ELECTION IN TAINAN COUNTY. MAGISTRATE SU, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS AN UNINSPIRING CAMPAIGNER BECAUSE HE TENDS TO DWELL ON LARGER POLICY MATTERS THAT BORE MOST VOTERS. SU, KUO LAMENTED, IS RUNNING AS A "DPP MAGISTRATE" (I.E., TALKING ABOUT POLICIES, PROPOSED PROGRAMS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS), RATHER THAN AS A "CANDIDATE" (I.E., PROJECTING AN ATTRACTIVE PERSONA, HOBNOBBING WITH THE VOTERS, PRESENTING HIMSELF AS A GOOD FAMILY MAN, AND EXPRESSING HIGH MORAL STANDARDS). MAGISTRATE SU'S POOR CAMPAIGN PERFORMANCE IS DAMAGING HIS CAMPAIGN AND ALIENATING DPP OFFICIALS AND EVEN HIS OWN CAMPAIGN WORKERS, COMPLAINED KUO.

14. (C) DPP OFFICIALS, ANXIOUS ABOUT THEIR CANDIDATE'S INABILITY TO PROJECT AN IMAGE AS A MAN OF THE PEOPLE, SAY THEY ARE FINDING THE 3-IN-1 ELECTION PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT BECAUSE PERSONAL CONNECTIONS AND GRASSROOTS SUPPORT ARE THE KEYS TO WINNING THE MAGISTERIAL SEAT. DPP OFFICIALS SAY THEIR CANDIDATE'S UNWILLINGNESS OR INABILITY TO JUMP INTO THE "PERSONAL POLITICS" ASPECT OF THE CAMPAIGN IS FORCING THEM TO RUN A PARTY-TO-PARTY RACE, AND THE RECENT DPP SCANDALS CAN ONLY DRAG THEM DOWN IN THAT KIND OF CONTEST. IN ADDITION, DPP HEADQUARTERS, ASSUMING IT CAN WIN HANDILY IN THE PRESIDENT'S BACKYARD, ISN'T OFFERING EITHER FINANCIAL OR HUMAN RESOURCES TO PARTY OFFICIALS IN TAINAN COUNTY, ACCORDING TO KUO.

15. (C) WHILE DPP OFFICIALS DO NOT BELIEVE THE TOUTED "MA YING-JEOU EFFECT" WILL HAVE MUCH OF AN IMPACT IN TAINAN COUNTY, THEY ARE AWARE THAT KMT CANDIDATE KUO TIEN-TSAI'S GREATEST STRENGTH MAY BE, IRONICALLY, THAT HE IS COLORLESS AND HAS NO DEFINABLE IMAGE AT ALL. HE HASN'T BEEN IN POLITICS LONG ENOUGH TO ACCUMULATE ANY NEGATIVES, NOTED DPP CHAIRMAN KUO, WHICH MAKES HIM A VERY TOUGH COMPETITOR, ESPECIALLY WHEN RIDING CHAIRMAN MA'S CLEAN COATTAILS (CONTRADICTING HIS DISMISSAL OF CHAIRMAN MA). KUO TOLD AIT/K THAT THE "CONTINUOUS HARPING" BY THE TAIWAN MEDIA ON DPP CORRUPTION HAS RAISED THE "MORAL STANDARD" FOR CANDIDATES IN THIS PARTICULAR ELECTION. ALTHOUGH THE CORRUPTION ISSUES, SAID CHAIRMAN KUO, WILL TAKE A BIGGER BITE OUT OF DPP VOTES

IN THE NORTH THAN THE SOUTH, THE DPP STANDS TO TAKE A SUBSTANTIAL HIT IN TAINAN COUNTY AS WELL, UNLESS INCUMBENT MAGISTRATE SU CAN SOMEHOW PREVENT THE TAINAN MAGISTRATE RACE FROM BECOMING A HEAD-ON PARTY-TO-PARTY FIGHT.

16. (C) KMT COUNTY CHAIRMAN SU MING-KUO ACKNOWLEDGED TO AIT/K THAT TAINAN COUNTY IS A DPP STRONGHOLD, PRIMARILY BECAUSE PRESIDENT CHEN IS A NATIVE SON. NEVERTHELESS, CHAIRMAN SU CONTINUED, THE KMT WAS SURPRISED BY THE LOW TURNOUT OF AROUND 500 PEOPLE DURING THE PRESIDENT'S LAST VISIT TO TAINAN COUNTY TO OPEN MAGISTRATE SU'S CAMPAIGN OFFICE. THE KMT ESTIMATES FULLY 50 PERCENT OF TAINAN VOTERS ARE STILL UNDECIDED AND IS HOPING TO PICK UP SOME OF THOSE VOTES, ALTHOUGH SU DOUBTS TRADITIONAL DPP SUPPORTERS WILL ACTUALLY VOTE FOR THE KMT. LIKE DPP CHAIRMAN KUO, KMT CHAIRMAN SU BELIEVES THESE VOTERS WILL SIMPLY STAY AWAY FROM THE POLLS ALTOGETHER. THIS WOULD STILL WORK TO THE KMT'S ADVANTAGE, ARGUED SU, BECAUSE MOST OF THOSE UNDECIDED VOTERS WOULD, IN TAINAN, TEND TO GO FOR THE DPP CANDIDATE. IN ADDITION, CHAIRMAN SU BELIEVES VISITS BY KMT CHAIRMAN MA YING-JEOU WILL BOOST KMT CHANCES IN TAINAN COUNTY BECAUSE MA IS SO POPULAR AMONG WOMEN AND YOUNG VOTERS UNDER 35.

17. KMT OFFICIALS TOLD AIT/K THAT DPP MAGISTRATE SU HAS THREE SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS THAT ARE TURNING WHAT WAS ONCE A FOREGONE DPP VICTORY INTO A NECK-TO-NECK RACE. FIRST, THE ONGOING DPP CORRUPTION SCANDAL IS DEPRESSING AND ALIENATING TRADITIONAL DPP SUPPORTERS. SECOND, HAVING FAILED TO FULFILL SEVERAL PREVIOUS CAMPAIGN PLEDGES (ECONOMIC AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT), MAGISTRATE SU'S APPROVAL RATING IS AMONG THE LOWEST OF THE INCUMBENT MAGISTERIAL CANDIDATES ISLAND-WIDE. THIRD, INTERNAL KMT POLLS SHOW 70 PER CENT OF GOVERNMENT WORKERS WILL NOT VOTE FOR INCUMBENT MAGISTRATE SU BECAUSE HE HAS PROVED HIMSELF TO BE A POOR MANAGER. IN ADDITION, THERE IS GROWING DISAFFECTION WITH THE DPP ITSELF BEYOND THE CORRUPTION ISSUES, NOTES KMT CHAIRMAN SU, BECAUSE THE ECONOMY HAS TAKEN A NOSE-DIVE SINCE THE DPP TOOK OVER THE GOVERNMENT IN 2000. THE GAP BETWEEN THE RICH AND POOR HAS GROWN AS A RESULT OF THE DPP'S SUPPOSED "FINANCIAL REFORM" POLICY, EXPLAINED SU, WHICH REFLECTS "COLLUSION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND BIG BUSINESS." AS SUCH, KMT OFFICIALS ARE MORE THAN HAPPY THAT DPP CANDIDATE SU IS TRYING TO DEFINE THIS AS A PARTY-TO-PARTY RACE.

18. (C) IN CONTRAST TO LOCAL DPP OFFICIALS' SUPPORT FOR THEIR NATIVE SON, KMT OFFICIALS BELIEVE PRESIDENT CHEN IS INTIMATELY INVOLVED IN THE KRTC CORRUPTION SCANDAL. PRESIDENT CHEN AND FORMER PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR CHEN CHE-NAN HAVE BEEN CLOSE ASSOCIATES SINCE THEY WERE TOGETHER IN TAINAN COUNTY, KMT CHAIRMAN SU TOLD AIT/K, AND KMT SUPPORTERS HAVE ALWAYS VIEWED CHEN CHE-NAN AS PRESIDENT CHEN'S "WHITE GLOVES MAN" (I.E., INTERMEDIARY WHO HANDLES DIRTY MONEY). THUS, THE KMT, SU EXPLAINED, INTENDS TO MAKE THE CORRUPTION ISSUE A CENTERPIECE OF ITS CAMPAIGN FOR TAINAN COUNTY MAGISTRATE.

19. (U) CONFLICTING PUBLIC OPINION POLLS INDICATE HOW CLOSE THE RACE HAS BECOME. TWO POLLS LAST WEEK BY APPLE DAILY AND UNITED DAILY NEWS SHOWED DPP LEADING BY, RESPECTIVELY, 4 PERCENT AND 7 PERCENT. THE UNITED DAILY POLLS FURTHER INDICATED THAT IN THE WAKE OF THE KRTC SCANDAL, THE DPP CANDIDATE'S POPULARITY DROPPED FROM 34 PERCENT TO 29 PERCENT, WHEREAS THE KMT CANDIDATE'S POPULARITY INCREASED FROM 20 TO 22 PERCENT.

10. (U) IN RESPONSE TO THE POLLING RESULTS, KMT TAINAN COUNTY CHAIRMAN SU MING-KUO TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE TAINAN MAGISTRATE ELECTION IS BECOMING A NECK-TO-NECK RACE BECAUSE OF FALLOUT FROM THE KRTC SCANDAL. HE NOTED THAT MANY DPP SUPPORTERS ARE DISAPPOINTED, HAVING LOST CONFIDENCE IN THE DPP ADMINISTRATION, WHEREAS KMT SUPPORTERS ARE REGAINING THEIR CONFIDENCE AND CONSOLIDATING THEIR SUPPORT. CHAIRMAN SU SAID HE IS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE ELECTION TURNOUT. DPP TAINAN COUNTY CHAIRMAN KUO KUO-WEN, ON THE OTHER HAND, PUBLICLY QUESTIONED THE CREDIBILITY OF THE POLLING GIVEN THE FACT THERE IS A LARGE DISCREPANCY IN THE RESULTS OF THE TWO MOST RECENT POLLS, BUT ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE POLLS SERVE AS A WARNING FOR ALL DPP CANDIDATES IN TAINAN COUNTY. MAGISTRATE SU HUAN-CHI'S SPOKESMAN YEN CHUN-TZUO POINTED OUT THAT THE NEWSPAPER POLLING IS NOTHING MORE THAN REFERENCE MATERIAL, ARGUING THAT INTERNAL DPP POLLS INDICATE CANDIDATE SU HAS A LEAD OF MORE THAN 10 PERCENT.

11. (C) THE TAINAN COUNTY "INDEX ELECTION" WILL BE ONE IMPORTANT GAUGE IN SOUTHERN TAIWAN OF HOW MUCH OF A HIT THE DPP HAS TAKEN IN ITS GRASSROOTS SUPPORT. THE POOR TURNOUT AT THE NOVEMBER 12 CAMPAIGN VISIT BY PRESIDENT CHEN TO TAINAN COUNTY SUPPORTS THE IMPRESSION THAT THIS RACE WILL BE EXTREMELY HARD FOUGHT DESPITE THE DPP'S HOME COURT ADVANTAGE.

END COMMENT.

Paal